Soldiers of the Bulge (author unknown)

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| Cold callous crippling tears  Never once allowed to cry  From the steeled black hollows  Of a soldier’s burning eye. |
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| Curled to seek a lonely rest  In a blanket knit of snow,  ‘Til the night lie shattered, shaken, torn,  About a thousand feet below. |
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| Winter split hands grip boldly  At freezing instruments of death,  And innocence evacuates the body  In every visible wintry breath. |
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| Extremes in regal fashion  Blunted by the fight,  And Hell’s own angels ascend  To take possession of the night. |
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| And spirits of a better nature  For a far off land have departed,  To comfort mothers, brother, sisters,  Fathers soon to be broken hearted |
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| Youth’s blissful illusions  Of paladin’s integral sword,  Fade in pain drenched strokes  Reaching a hushed, grim accord. |
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| “Up now and to your posts”  A call lifting above drizzling fog,  And a thousand rays of light  Charge a blackened demagogue. |
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| So brothers locked in battle  Moved forward by unseen force,  Like a current pushing patterned waves  In rhythm from their source. |
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| Grieving widows will be born  From the Bulge’s empty womb,  And a soldier’s bonds forever strengthened,  Lifting brothers to their tomb.  http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/423-soldiers-of-the-bulge-poem.html |

**The Battle of the Bulge**

In late 1944, during the wake of the Allied forces' successful D-Day invasion of Normandy, France, it seemed as if the Second World War was all but over. On Dec. 16, with the onset of winter, the German army launched a counteroffensive that was intended to cut through the Allied forces in a manner that would turn the tide of the war in Hitler's favor. The battle that followed is known historically as the Battle of the Bulge. Early on the misty winter morning of Dec. 16, 1944, more than 200,000 German troops and nearly 1,000 tanks launched Adolf Hitler's last attempt to stop the German weakening that had begun when Allied troops landed in France on D-Day. Seeking to drive to the coast of the English Channel and split the Allied armies as they had done in May 1940, the Germans struck in the Ardennes Forest, a 75-mile stretch of the front characterized by dense woods and few roads, held by four inexperienced and battle-worn American divisions stationed there for rest and seasoning.

After a day of hard fighting, the Germans broke through the American front, surrounding most of an infantry division, seizing key crossroads, and advancing their spearheads toward the Meuse River, creating the projection that gave the battle its name.

Stories spread of the massacre of Soldiers and civilians at Malmedy and Stavelot, of paratroopers dropping behind the lines, and of English-speaking German soldiers, disguised as Americans, capturing critical bridges, cutting communications lines, and spreading rumors. For those who had lived through 1940, the picture was all too familiar. Belgian townspeople put away their Allied flags and brought out their swastikas. Police in Paris enforced an all-night curfew. British veterans waited nervously to see how the Americans would react to a full-scale German offensive, and British generals quietly acted to safeguard the Meuse River's crossings. Even American civilians, who had thought final victory was near were sobered by the Nazi onslaught.

But this was not 1940. The supreme Allied commander, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower rushed reinforcements to hold the shoulders of the German penetration. Within days, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr. had turned his Third U.S. Army to the north and was counterattacking against the German flank. But the story of the Battle of the Bulge is above all the story of American Soldiers. Often isolated and unaware of the overall picture, they did their part to slow the Nazi advance, whether by delaying armored spearheads with stubborn defenses of vital crossroads, moving or burning critical gasoline stocks to keep them from the fuel-hungry German tanks, or coming up with questions on American trivia and history to stump possible Nazi infiltrators.

[](https://www.army.mil/e2/rv5_images/botb/slides/overview2_lg.jpg)[](https://www.army.mil/e2/rv5_images/botb/slides/overview1_lg.jpg)

(above) American engineers emerge from the woods and move out of defensive positions after fighting in the vicinity of Bastogne, Belgium. (top) Three members, of an American patrol, Sgt. James Storey, of Newman, Ga., Pvt. Frank A. Fox, of Wilmington, Del., and Cpl. Dennis Lavanoha, of Harrisville, N.Y., cross a snow-covered Luxembourg field on a scouting mission in Lellig, Luxembourg, Dec. 30, 1944. White bedsheets camouflage them in the snow.

At the critical road junctions of St. Vith and Bastogne, American tankers and paratroopers fought off repeated attacks, and when the acting commander of the 101st Airborne Division in Bastogne was summoned by his German adversary to surrender, he simply responded, "Nuts!"

Within days, Patton's Third Army had relieved Bastogne, and to the north, the 2nd U.S. Armored Division stopped enemy tanks short of the Meuse River on Christmas. Through January, American troops, often wading through deep snow drifts, attacked the sides of the shrinking bulge until they had restored the front and set the stage for the final drive to victory.

Never again would Hitler be able to launch an offensive in the west on such a scale. An admiring British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill stated, "This is undoubtedly the greatest American battle of the war and will, I believe, be regarded as an ever-famous American victory." Indeed, in terms of participation and losses (Americans- 80,000 casualties; Germans, 80,000-100,000 causalities), the Battle of the Bulge is arguably the greatest battle in American military history, and it ultimately led to the collapse of Germany’s western front.

Courtesy of the [U.S. Army Center of Military History](http://www.history.army.mil/html/reference/bulge/index.html)

<https://www.army.mil/botb/>



Questions for Thought:

1. According to the article, British leader Winston Churchill stated, "This is undoubtedly the greatest American battle of the war and will, I believe, be regarded as an ever-famous American victory." Yet, it was not without cost to the American forces. Find 3 lines in the poem that suggest that Americans sacrificed much for this victory. Explain.

2. Reread the passage “The courage of the American Soldier was tested against great adversity. Nevertheless, the quality of his response ultimately meant the victory of freedom over tyranny.”

Explain, in your own words, what this passage implies. Which stanza in the poem reinforces this thought? Why?

3. Explain what Hitler’s military objective was in the “Battle of the Bulge”, why it was so difficult for both sides, and what happened as a result of the battle.